



[Frederick Engels, 1820-1895](#)

Proletarians and Communists

We only need one text for one discussion per week, but the Communist University always gives alternatives, which can also be used for supplementary reading. Yesterday we took the first part of the [Communist Manifesto](#). Here is the second part, called [Proletarians and Communists](#).

As with the first part of this highly-concentrated piece of writing, the simplest way to present it is with selected quotes. Here are some:

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class

parties by this only:

(1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.

(2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The text then deals with property, and with marriage, in similar terms to “[The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State](#)”, which was written 35 years later. One of the remarkable things about the “Manifesto” is that it summarises ideas which had not yet been published and knocked into shape by controversy, yet it did so very accurately, and the Manifesto still stands tall today. On ideas, and on the struggle of ideas, it says, among other things:

The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

When people speak of the ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express that fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.

The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs.

But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms.

The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

Finally, the Manifesto arrives, at the end of the second part, at the following tremendous vision of communism as the purest possible kind of human freedom:

Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat... by means of a revolution, makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Communist Manifesto, Proletarians and Communists, Marx and Engels.](#)
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